

Child and Family Services Update

December 2006

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Please share your
thoughts by sending
them to Carol Miller
at
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Snippets from the Director

By Richard Anderson

Gung Ho!

You probably wonder at times if anyone can fully understand the nature of your work, if they are not presently facing the many complex dilemmas in domestic violence and child welfare. The laws, guidelines, regulations, and expectations are like a large wave in the ocean. We sometimes feel like that of a small ship maneuvering to keep afloat. In the midst of the turbulence of expectations for our job, it is important that we don't lose sight of the purpose we need to achieve. Many ethical decisions are often forced into a tight moment. With what you know at the time during crisis, you are forced to make decisions, either alone or with your team. Well, what I see time and time again is that you do what is ethical in terms of what is most protective from abuse and neglect. You also bring these challenges to the attention of administration so that unworkable or obsolete requirements can be changed. You keep building better approaches to our work. You keep strengthening the teams for better outcomes for those we serve. You are a *gung ho!* team, but it is taking each of you, the individual, to make this all happen.

Recently, I thought of these dilemmas and about all of you while going over an old scrapbook of my late father-in-law. It was his book of memories from World War II. He was a member of a select and very tough bunch, the Marine Raider Battalion. This group was involved in two of the most terrifying missions during the war: Makin Island and Guadalcanal. They were the first to go onto the beaches, at night on small boats, to pave the way for air strikes of these islands. In the scrapbook was a Reader's Digest article about this group of Marines and their leader, Colonel Evans Carlson, printed in 1943. Carlson used what he called the *gung ho* system.

I know that war and military analogies might be risky, but stay with me a bit. *Gung ho* is a term that we briefly studied at the supervisor conference this year. (Many of you may have now viewed the video that we purchased for all of your regions to



use). Colonel Carlson designed a system he titled *gung ho*: *gung*, meaning work and *ho*, meaning harmony. *Gung ho* means work harmony. It is based on the individual's effort. The individual is valued. In this system, there was a combination of training on technical skills and "ethical indoctrination". Rank meant nothing until one proved their right to it. Social distinctions by rank were abolished. They attacked all discrimination based on the type of work one did. *Gung ho* was the yardstick for one's competency, not rank. To jump in and help a man out of a tight spot, to jump in and do anything which needed doing, without asking whose turn it was to do it—that was *gung ho*. There was absolute freedom of expression. In one of the many *gung ho* meetings a Corporal said, "Sir, I don't think it was a good idea to have to meet the submarines at a certain time. If we could have waited until the surf went down, I think we could have saved some lives." Colonel Carlson's prompt reply, "You're right. There was a special reason we did it this time—but I'll never do it again." More often, if an officer had made a miscue he called attention to it before anyone else had a chance. When the instructions did not work, each person went to work to solve the problem with their best thinking and with the best of teamwork. There were times in very overwhelming situations of war when the Colonel would yell, "*gung ho!*" and the focus was on success and each person using all their best training and all their personal effort. After the battalion was merged into other groups, the *gung ho* system was abandoned. Colonel Carlson related that he received many notes in letters from members of the old battalion like this one, "We have a very beautiful camp, but the boys would chuck it for a dirty sack of rice and the privilege to be Raiders and shout '*Gung ho!*'"

Now, we have to be the best at what we do. We build our skills and we know the ethical positions of our division. There has to be a *gung ho* system as we rely on each other, which includes our children, our families, and our partners in this work. We are tightly aligned in purpose and in actions on our plan. We are becoming more and more a *gung ho!* statewide team. As I look across all our regions, the state office, and our communities, more *work harmony* is what I see. Thanks for bringing to pass a better way to make a difference in society—one child, one family, and one associate in this work, at a time.



Salt Lake Valley Region Winning at Half-time

Salt Lake Valley Region just successfully finished their first round of the Qualitative Case Review (QCR) for this year with passing performance. Salt Lake Valley Region has the opportunity each year to have two QCRs, including triple the number of cases reviewed of any other region (72 versus 24). So, at this point, Salt Lake Valley Region's success is half way to complete this year. After the great achievement of Western Region passing their QCR, we now have Salt Lake Valley Region on the same road to glory.

A quick run down of the Salt Lake Valley Region first half demonstrate the following admirable results from their phenomenal efforts. In 21 Total Domains (both system performance and child and family status):

- 17 Domains were up in performance
- 16 Domains were over 85%
- 8 Domains were over 90%
- Child and Family Planning came up 23% from last year
- 5 Domains came up 14% or more

Congratulations to Salt Lake Valley Region for a great first half!!



Partnership

What I Wish I Could Say

From A Foster Mom

To People who ask me, in front of the kids, “Are you going to keep them?”

For one thing, they can hear you. They hear your question and if we're lucky, they'll ask me about it later. Otherwise, it just feeds their insecurity. But to answer the question: it's not up to me. This is foster care. I take care of these children while things get worked out at home.

To People who say, “Oh I sure hope they don't have to go back...”

You don't even know the situation. Actually, their mother is a very nice, gentle person who loves these kids with all her heart. Her life has obviously not gone as she hoped and she's now in a bad situation. She wasn't raised like you may have been and she never learned some of the skills she needed. And you know, some people have their kids taken away because of a moment of poor judgment, and I imagine we've all been guilty of making some mistakes in our lives.

To People who say, “Oh, I could never do foster care. I would just love the kids so much I could never give them back.”

(This one usually leaves me speechless but I'll try.) There are different kinds of love. Sometimes a greater love is giving all you can to someone you know is going to leave. It's not glamorous though--when the kids come, they may or may not have an actual bag of stuff with them, but they most certainly have other baggage that can be very difficult to deal with. Someone has to help. But anyway, if you can't actually take in a child, which is totally fine, there are lots of other ways to help. Ask us how you can help. Please. We're on the frontlines but we need lots of support.

To My Three Little Girls:

When I first met you, it was at the Christmas Box Shelter. I wondered what the future held for us all. Life changes so much sometimes. You



doubled the size of our family and it's been no small amount of work. You came to us as grunting, whining, crying little girls with no social or hygiene skills. I remember walking into the bathroom and seeing three naked girls all sitting on the potty at the same time. I'd never seen that before. And now, even though it was only supposed to be a few months, here we are two years later. You're beautiful, happy little girls who love to draw and sing and dress up and yes, even use your words to tell us what you want.

I'm so sorry for the things you've had to deal with. I hear about the first six or seven years of life being so crucial and I think of your first years. I know it's been hard and confusing going back and forth between homes and trying to figure out relationships and wondering what will happen. But I also know that God prepares us all and helps us along the way. When you hold my face and say, "You're my mom, huh?" I say "Yes!" and hope that's okay. I try to imagine how it feels to be you so I can try to be a better me.



To People who say, "Don't you just snuggle them all day?"

Um, no. While it's true that they've had some bad times, feeding that would just cripple them. I insisted they learn to dress themselves, to eat properly, to go to bed on time in their own beds, to verbalize instead of behaving like animals. But yes, we do snuggle. That's their favorite thing.

To People who say, "Oh, You're so Good."

Actually, I sometimes feel so bad. I have yelled at them--imagine that. I have ignored them. I have told them to please just be quiet. I have put them on a time out and then put myself on one. I have been so worn out that sometimes, I have put them to bed with no story and (don't tell DCFS) I didn't even brush their teeth. I have wondered if this whole thing was even a good idea. I have to remind myself, fairly often, that my completely imperfect efforts are good for something. I have also apologized to them. In short, it's like mothering your own kids.

To Their Mother:

My heart goes out to you over and over. I know you love your kids and I imagine how you must feel. I have never intended to take them from you. I feel like we've tried so hard for so long to help you but it's just not working. I guess this is when we really do have to just think of the good of the kids. I remember one day you told me thanks for taking care of them. I know that wasn't easy to say.

To Their Father:

I think there are a lot of people that would like a word with you, if we could catch you. But if you could hear me, I'd ask you if you realize what you have helped do. I am truly sorry you haven't learned a better way. But these kids have a loving father now. Wherever they live, he'll still be their father.

To My Own Kids:

You are saints in my eyes and I couldn't do this without you. You have sacrificed and shared and put up with the running and shrieking and crying and all the things they've broken or ruined. You didn't complain about the times I missed your meets because I had to take the girls for a visit. You have jumped in when I was hitting the wall. And you got over it after you hit the wall. You have played with them and taken them to school games and told them stories at night. It has been hard, but good, to see firsthand the problems other people deal with, and the consequences of choices.

Your dad and I went into foster care cautiously, because we didn't want it to hurt our own family. Sometimes in the moment, I've thought, "This is what I didn't want." But over time, and with lots of talking, things seem to heal and end up okay. Sacrifice brings blessings. This has been hard and I don't recommend it to everyone, but our family has grown closer through this effort to help three little girls.



To My Husband:

You are the calm, steady influence walking in the door after work. Instead of backing away from a father, now they can run to a Dad. Now Dad means tickling, snuggling, playing games, and unconditional love every day. They needed a Dad and they got the best one.

To Our Caseworker:

No one envies your job. You are like this central hub having to communicate and work things out a hundred directions. Thanks for working so hard to help these kids and all the families involved. Thanks for being patient with me and always trying to be so cheerful. You're like a teacher--underpaid but influencing the world.

To the Judge:

All our lives seem to be in your hands. I pray for you, very hard. I wish your court were more comfortable so we could talk a little, or at all. It feels to me like a cold, legal world that takes half an hour now and then to determine the fates of little warm children and their families. I wish we could have a big meeting where you could come down to us and the assistant attorney general and the lawyers--and we could all talk openly about what would make this whole system better.

To the United States of America:

I am so grateful to live in a country that tries to help people. In the first Family Team Meeting I was in, I saw the variety of people there and thought, "This is incredible how all these people join to try to help this one family." We care for our struggling people, children, or adults. I know it's not a perfect or efficient system, but it gives the birth parents a chance to change and gives them help changing if they want to. It's a good land we live in and life is what you make of it.

That's what I would say.

Organizational Competence

A Delay Can't Hurt...Can It?

Impact of Delaying Entry of Foster Child Placement Changes in SAFE

By Cosette Mills, Federal Revenue Manager

In the last six months, 49% of foster child placement changes were entered into SAFE later than five days after the change occurred, which is the practice guidelines time frame for entering these changes (Section 704.1.B). About 30% were entered later than 10 days, and nearly 10% were entered later than 30 days after the placement change occurred.

Perhaps you're saying to yourself, "...and this matters because?" I know demands on caseworkers are high and this may seem to be a trivial matter, but delays in entering correct placement information in SAFE can have negative consequences for the foster children, their parents, foster parents, out-of-home care providers, partner agencies, caseworkers, and administrative staff. Similarly, delay of case closure can cause the same types of problems. Here are some examples of what happens when placement changes aren't finalized in SAFE timely:

➤ **Knowing Where the Foster Child Is**

Most important, if the placement is not accurately recorded, there is no record of the child's primary caregiver and where to locate the child. What if the caseworker isn't immediately available and an urgent situation arises? In the event of an emergency, we would not be able to locate our children. We may not have a Hurricane Katrina coming our way, but we do need to be prepared for other types of emergencies or disasters on a small or large scale, and having correct placement information is essential. ***(Please note, no placement change is needed for temporary stays where designation of the caregiver hasn't changed, such as respite care or weekend trial visits.)***

➤ **Having Funds for Client Services**

In FY 2006, late placement changes, particularly for high cost placements, directly resulted in one region underestimating by \$1.8 million how much funding was going to be available for client services. This means the region could have had an additional \$1.8 million to spend on client services last year if placement information had been kept current.

➤ **Delaying Access to Health Care for Foster Children**

Fostering Healthy Children Nurses are not able to notify the correct foster family or provider to meet the child's health care needs when placement information is incorrect. Time and resources are wasted in sending notices to incorrect providers and having to do duplicate work once the placement is updated in SAFE. This also results in overdue items for caseworkers. In addition, the Medicaid card will be sent to the wrong provider, which can delay access to



necessary health care and creates additional work for eligibility workers and caseworkers.

➤ **Foster Parents and Providers Have Incorrect Payments**

520 forms are sent to incorrect providers when placement changes are delayed. This has resulted in a number of providers being overpaid or paid incorrectly, with Child and Family Services staff then having to go back to the provider for repayment and to make payment adjustments. Also, this results in caseworkers getting calls from current providers and having to manually generate payment forms. This often results in late payments to foster parents and providers, creating unnecessary stress and financial burden. This has also caused Joyous Season Payments to be sent to incorrect foster parents and providers.

➤ **Parents of Foster Children Are Incorrectly Charged for Child Support by ORS**

ORS relies on placement information in SAFE to accurately identify periods for which parents of children in foster care are required to pay child support and to track the amount of collections to costs. When placements are not accurate or recorded timely, parents may be charged for incorrect periods or may have to be charged retroactively for periods of time. This also causes significant additional work for ORS staff to have to retroactively make adjustments.

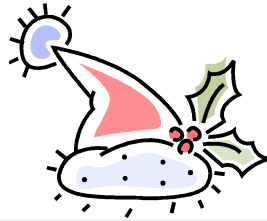


➤ **Creates Unnecessary Burden on Many Other Child and Family Services Workers**

- Regional administrators are hindered in getting accurate portrayals of what is happening in out-of-home services programmatically and fiscally. Numerous other employees have to make adjustments, take complaints, urgently process payments, track down repayments, and much more.
- SAFE Helpdesk must do significant maintenance work when a placement is missed or must be entered because the change was not made prior to a rate or contract change.
- Regional eligibility staff must make retroactive adjustments to eligibility determinations. This then results in having to make adjustments in accounting records, payment histories, and claiming of federal funds.
- It is much more difficult for Child and Family Services to provide the essential, accurate reporting required for the legislature and federal government so that we can have the funds necessary to serve children and families.

Like we say to our children when they throw things under their beds when asked to clean their rooms, it would be so much easier to do it right the first time. ***Entering and finalizing placement changes in SAFE as soon as children are moved to a new placement will save a lot of people unnecessary stress and additional work and will free up resources and time to better serve the children and families who are relying on us.*** Regional administration, supervisors, caseworkers, and caseworker

assistants are encouraged to review current region practices for entry of placement changes to ensure that the most efficient processes are in place for timely entry of placement information.



Professional Competence

Citizen Board Recognition Banquet

By Richard Anderson, Director

Wow! What a fantastic event our Board held on November 17, 2006 to honor the top child welfare performers from each region. Tammy Ardohain (Eastern), Effie Graham (Southwest), Abel Kanigan (Western), Cody McBride (Salt Lake Valley), and Gwen Zabokrtsky (Northern) represent our best. I congratulate them for all they do each day to bring such admirable acknowledgment to their accomplishments for children and families. They were most gracious as they received the awards. Each one had their loved one there, and it was apparent they also have great fans at home. I would hope that, even though only one from each region was recognized, all of you will know that this recognition comes to the work all of you do in Child and Family Services. The status of your work is growing, and this is why such recognition has come.

After many years of trying to find a way to enlarge the recognition for all of you, I have now received amazing support from our Board, starting with the first Annual Child Welfare Professional Recognition Banquet sponsored by private corporations and foundations. This is what was envisioned--our staff being recognized and supported by the community. Our Citizen Board took this charge and moved on it when they started to travel the state to recognize many of you when they held their Board meeting in your areas. Now, they have achieved the next high level of recognition--this wonderful annual event. Each person received their award and some gifts given by the sponsors.

Kim Wilde has made a great presentation ([click here](#)) for you to see some of the event in pictures and a description of what happened. Please take the time to read through it. My message to our five wonderful staff is one I think all of you may relate to. What I had to say to them is a message that I want to send to all of you as well.

We can now look forward to future recognitions of this quality, which will grow even larger in time.



Youth In Custody (YIC) Program: Note To Those Who Work With Youth In This Program

I realize how much you feel the responsibility for the youth you serve. They need your support and your advocacy in so many ways. Here is one of the items that I want you to look at in your evaluation of your relationship to the Youth In Custody (YIC) Program.



All youth are to be in the mainstream school environment unless there is a specific and appropriate reason for them not to be. The YIC Program is to have the least restrictive educational setting for our youth. The state YIC coordinator told me there should never be a situation where a student, who is at grade level and can be mainstreamed, is placed in a self-contained YIC classroom. I have heard of instances where our youth are in the self-contained classroom when they might be better served in the mainstream setting. Although it is difficult to normalize things for youth who are not at home, this is one thing we can do for them. School is such a big part of their lives. So, what we need is advocacy for any youth who should be in the main school programming and are not in that placement.

Recently, when I met with several older youth, they told me it is not only embarrassing, but also they feel they cannot move along at school as they would like to due to the contained setting. One of the most disheartening messages from youth in our care is when they express that they did nothing wrong that led to their being removed from their home, but now they feel punished in so many ways. We just need to keep moving toward more normalized activities for them.

Thanks for continuing to work on ways to give the youth more support and more normal experiences. Review your youth and make sure they are in the right setting at school. Thanks for whatever you can do.



Your Documentation Impacts More Than You May Realize!

By Linda Prince and Navina Forsythe, Data, Research & Reporting Team

As a caseworker, you have the power to impact much more than the children and families you work with. You have the power to impact legislation, research, grants, and funding for programs and perhaps even the way services are delivered.

"How could I possibly do all that?" you might ask.

Every time you complete information in SAFE on the persons and services you give, the data is often used to provide information to defeat or support a legislative bill, support a

grant request, determine funding, demonstrate the need for a services or identify an unmet need, and to backup programs or pilot programs that show certain supports or interventions work.

One area that has received much attention is substance abuse. With the heightened public awareness of methamphetamine drug abuse and all the problems seen from the medical and human services fields associated with the growing problem, a case contributing factor and person characteristic “drug abuse, methamphetamine” was added to SAFE last March. There are so many unknowns for children who have been exposed to methamphetamine contamination. Researchers are just beginning to track the long-range medical and development impacts on these children. Although we know it is a big problem, it would be helpful in many aspects to be able to pull the numbers of cases and person affected.

Please help us identify the full impact of substance abuse as well as other issues our families face by completely and accurately marking the case contributing factors and person characteristics, as well as all other fields in SAFE.



***Happy Holidays,
Everyone!***

